Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALLEGED PREMEDITATED FABRICATION AND INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN THE RESCUE OF PRIVATE FIRST CLASS JESSICA LYNCH, U.S. ARMY

I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

We initiated a preliminary inquiry to address allegations that the rescue of former Prisoner of War (POW), Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch, U.S. Army, may have been a "premeditated fabrication" and that "our armed forces involved in Private Lynch's rescue acted dishonorably . . . ." The allegations were referred to this Office in a joint letter dated May 21, 2003, from Congressman Rahm Emanuel and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, who cited news articles published by the British Broadcasting Corporation as the source of those allegations. The Members of Congress indicated that an investigation was necessary "to ensure that their [referring to Service members who participated in the rescue] selfless act of heroism is never questioned again."

Based on the results of a preliminary inquiry conducted by the Inspector General (IG), United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), we concluded that the allegations were not substantiated and that no further investigation was warranted.[1] During the inquiry, the IG, USCENTCOM, reviewed numerous classified operational documents that were not available to the media and interviewed over 30 witnesses, many of whom had first-hand knowledge of events at issue. The results of the USCENTCOM inquiry were provided in a classified report dated July 17, 2003. The information set forth in this Executive Summary is unclassified.

We reviewed the USCENTCOM report using standards established by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency as set forth in the publication, "Quality Standards for Investigations," dated September 1997. With respect to investigative reporting, the publication states that "reports must thoroughly address all relevant aspects of the investigation and be accurate, clear, complete, concise, logically organized, timely, and objective." In addition, we examined whether the preponderance of evidence supported the conclusions drawn by USCENTCOM. We concluded that the USCENTCOM preliminary inquiry met established standards for such work and that the evidence supported its conclusions that the allegations were not substantiated.

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[1] Following our policy and standard practice, we requested the Inspector General (IG), Joint Staff, to initiate a preliminary inquiry into the matter. In turn, the Joint Staff requested that the IG, USCENTCOM, conduct the inquiry under our oversight.

II. BACKGROUND

PFC Lynch was captured outside Nasiriyah, Iraq, on March 23, 2003, after her company convoy was ambushed by the Iraqi military. U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) rescued PFC Lynch on April 1, 2003, at a hospital in Nasiriyah, Iraq. The successful rescue of PFC Lynch was the subject of intense media coverage and on May 18, 2003, the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasted allegations that the rescue of PFC Lynch was a "premeditated fabrication" produced by the U.S. military for television audiences and that the U.S. military exaggerated the danger of the mission.

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.

A. Was the rescue of PFC Lynch a "premeditated fabrication?"

Short Answer: USCENTCOM found no evidence that the rescue mission of PFC Lynch was a staged media event but determined that the rescue operation constituted a valid mission to recover a U.S. POW under combat conditions.

The USCENTCOM inquiry found that U.S. military personnel planned and executed the rescue of PFC Lynch in accordance with all pertinent military procedures. Many factors influenced the planning and conduct of the rescue mission including: the ever-changing situation on the battlefield, an incomplete knowledge of enemy force disposition, the concern about being lured into a trap, and the time needed to marshal the forces necessary for the mission. Taking into account all the planning factors used by U.S. Special Forces (USSOF) during the rescue mission, there did not appear to be any unnecessary delay in the execution of the mission nor did there appear to be any inappropriate influence exerted on the planners or executors of the mission.

The rescue was filmed by a combat cameraman and a member of USSOF in accordance with standard procedures used by USSOF. The filming of the mission followed standard procedures used by task force personnel during the conduct of Operation Iraqi Freedom. USSOF routinely films high priority missions per verbal order of a USSOF leader; however, no public affairs personnel were involved in the planning or filming of the operation.

USSOF anticipated facing 200-300 Baathist/paramilitary forces in the hospital. Several enemy units were also located near the hospital complex and could reinforce the units in the hospital with an estimated 2000-3000 soldiers in a matter of minutes. These units had armor, artillery, air defense, and infantry available to respond to a Coalition attack.

The forces selected to conduct the mission were based on the anticipated enemy threat and had to be able to counter all enemy capabilities within and near the hospital complex. The level of force used by USSOF to perform the mission was consistent with the anticipated resistance and established doctrine. USSOF received conflicting information regarding the number of enemy personnel in the hospital but fully expected to meet stiff resistance including guards on PFC Lynch's room.

No member of the rescuing force carried or used any blank ammunition during the mission. The task force members carried standard munitions for this type of operation.

USSOF personnel initially breached locked doors in the hospital compound by using the shotgunning technique (shooting the hinges with a shotgun) or linear charges. Later during the mission an Iraqi doctor offered keys to some of the rooms to members of the task force. After they received the keys from the doctor, USSOF did not breach any doors that could be unlocked using keys.

B. Did Service members exhibited inappropriate or dishonorable behavior during the rescue mission?

Short Answer: The USCENTCOM IG found no evidence that any U.S. military member exhibited inappropriate or dishonorable behavior in connection with the PFC Lynch rescue mission.

USSOF conducted a personnel recovery mission, during wartime, in a nonpermissive environment, to rescue a U.S. POW from a hostile enemy location. During the mission USSOF received enemy fire from the hospital building, the surrounding complex, and nearby areas. They successfully engaged the enemy forces they encountered, neutralizing them without sustaining any casualties of their own. USSOF members entered the hospital complex fully expecting to meet further enemy resistance.

During the conduct of the mission, members of USSOF followed the Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) and Rules of Engagement (ROE) relevant to the mission. None of the USSOF personnel saw or heard of any mistreatment of Iraqis during the rescue. USSOF personnel could have used more force than they did and still have been in keeping with their TTP and ROE.

USSOF found no indication that any service member was "acting for the camera" during the rescue mission. In fact, all USSOF members were offended when questioned about such an accusation.